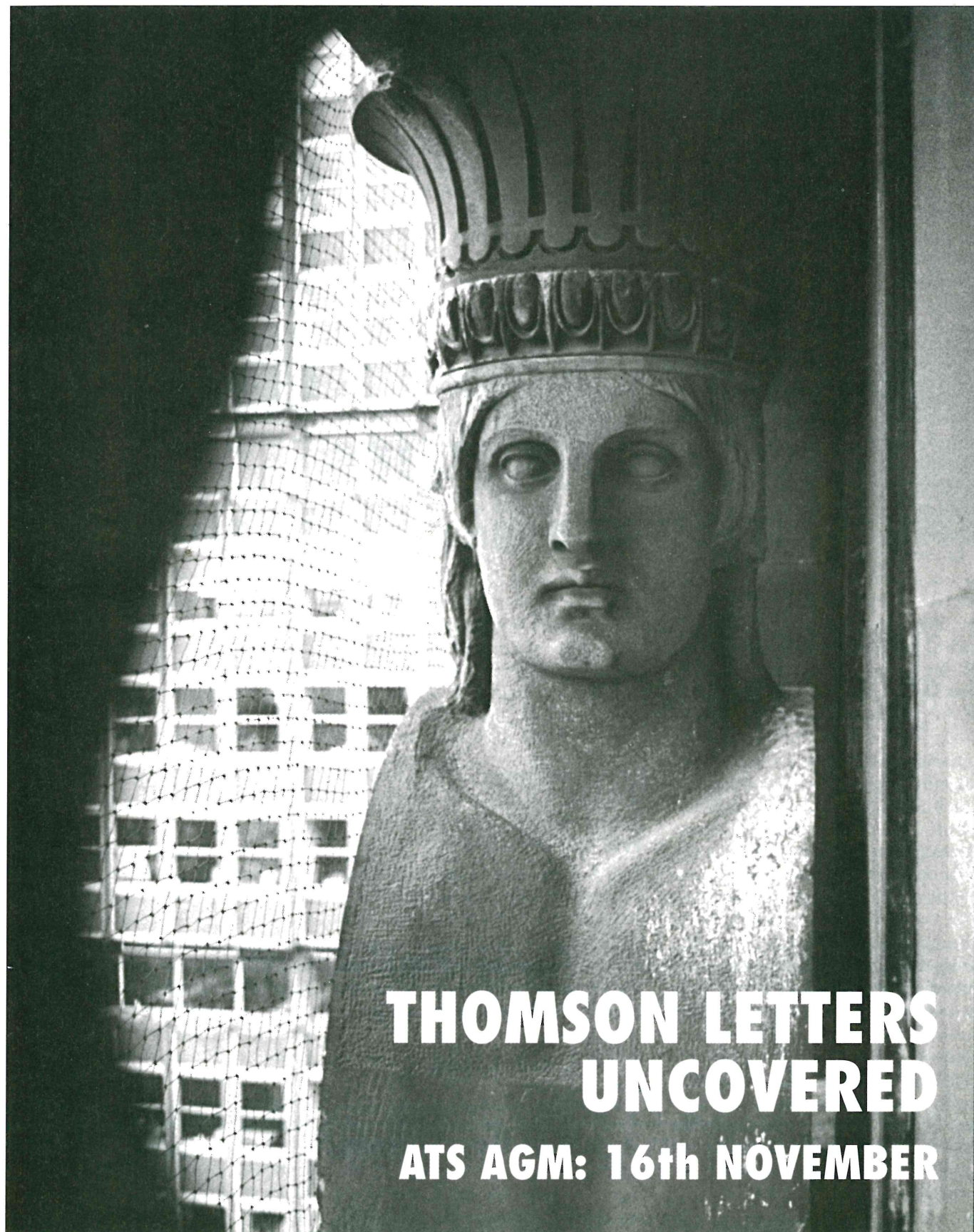


The Alexander Thomson Society **NEWSLETTER**



Nº 11 OCTOBER 1994



**THOMSON LETTERS
UNCOVERED**

ATS AGM: 16th NOVEMBER

FRANCIS WORSDALL

Anyone familiar with the late Frank Worsdall's books on Glasgow will know that he held Alexander Thomson in high regard. It is also clear that he was exasperated by official neglect and destruction of Thomson's buildings. In *The City that Disappeared*, he wrote of Queen's Park Terrace that it was, "Compulsorily purchased by the local authority who, despite more than one plan for its renovation, allowed the building to deteriorate to such an extent that it could be declared dangerous. The work of demolition began on St Andrew's Day 1980. Surely there is some significance in that choice of date? To demolish one of the treasures of Scottish architecture by Scotland's greatest architect, on Scotland's national day, seems to me to be deliberately perverse. It is, however, typical of the attitude of the District Council, which frequently shows a disregard of the wishes of those who know and love this sadly dismembered city." Such opinions naturally did not endear him to those in authority.

In recent years Worsdall had suffered ill-health and had become increasingly isolated and withdrawn. He died last May shortly after a fire ravaged much of the house in Rutherglen in which he lived surrounded by papers and drawings.

The tragedy is that much unpublished research on Thomson, amongst other Glasgow architects, together with many photographs of his buildings was destroyed in the conflagration. Fortunately, some material was rescued thanks to the alacrity and good sense of Strathclyde Regional Archives. But the Garnkirk Urn (*pictured*) which Worsdall had rescued, in pieces, from the Caledonia Road Church shortly before that building was gutted by fire fell apart in the heat and ended up in a skip. This seems to symbolise the tragedy of his life: that he did so much for Glasgow's architecture and yet his efforts were ultimately in vain as—both because he was an outsider and also, it must be said, because of his own character—he was never properly appreciated or recognised.

Roger Guthrie contributes the following tribute:

Frank Worsdall was the Glasgow architectural historian and his lectures, books and guided walks enhanced the image and reputation of this city. Articles in *Scottish Field* and later books on *The Glasgow Tenement*, *The City That Disappeared*, *A Glasgow Keek Show*, etc, reached a wide audience and his influence upon a group of like-minded enthusiasts had permanent results.

42 Virginia Street, 1867, by Melvin and Leiper was retained following a public local enquiry where the authoritative evidence from Frank demolished the expert witnesses acting for Marks and Spencer's. At the enquiry into the proposed demolition of St Jude's Church in West

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ACTIVITIES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THIS YEAR'S Annual General Meeting will be held at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 16th, at N° 3 Park Terrace by courtesy of Lucy Parr and Graeme Shearer, who have restored the 'Victorian Drawing Room' of Sir James Bain, Lord Provost of Glasgow in 1874-77.

Members attending the AGM will have an opportunity of seeing the magnificent decoration of the first floor interior which has been brought back to life. We hope you will be able to attend. Refreshments will be available and no booking ahead is necessary, but seating is limited, so come early!

WINTER LECTURES

We plan another series of evening lectures in February and March. Topics include the United Presbyterians and the work of such architects as James Sellars and Harvey Lonsdale Elmes, the latter as a prelude to our visit to Liverpool.

LIVERPOOL VISIT

As announced in the last *Newsletter*, we are planning our first trip abroad next year when we visit Liverpool to see, amongst other magnificent

pieces of architecture, that which Thomson considered to be one of "unquestionably the two finest buildings in the kingdom": St George's Hall. However, we have been thwarted in our intention to make the visit mark Thomson's birthday on April 9th owing to the coincidence of the Grand National at Aintree. We shall therefore be staying at the Adelphi Hotel the preceding weekend, from the evening of Friday, March 31st, to Sunday, April 2nd.

We very much hope members will support this venture and we invite bookings, with a £10 deposit, as soon as possible (to be sent, with a stamped addressed envelope, to 1 Moray Place, G41 2AQ).

DEAR GEORGE...

We have precious few documents surviving from Alexander Thomson's own hand and the only letters which seem still to exist are the five he wrote to his brother George between 1871 and 1874. George Thomson, who had become Alexander's professional partner in 1856, had surrendered to his calling and, in May 1871, had left for West Africa to become a missionary. On his way home in the spring of 1875, George received letters at Madeira informing him that his brother had died on March 22nd. The following year, he returned to the station at Victoria in the Cameroons, where he perished, of disease and exhaustion, on December 14th, 1878. All this is recounted in the *Memoir of George Thomson, Cameroons Mountains, West Africa*, by one of his Nephews, the Revd J.E.H. Thomson [Edinburgh, Andrew Elliot, 1881].

George Thomson was born at Balfron on May 26th, 1819, two years after Alexander, in whose footsteps he at first followed. He trained in the office of John Baird when Alexander was principal draughtsman. In 1856 George succeeded the other John Baird (his brother-in-law) as Alexander's business partner. According to his nephew, "he had a large share in the execution of St. Vincent Street Church. When Dr. Beattie's congregation removed from Gordon Street to St. Vincent Street, they entrusted to George Thomson the duty of making plans for the new church. It was in reality, however, a joint work: while he supplied the general plan and main features, the detail was his brother's; as he admitted himself throughout his brother's disciple, it was easier to secure a harmonious union of each part to the whole. He had the most complete confidence in the ultimate success of his brother's theory of architecture, and belief in its correctness..."

In truth, it is difficult to believe that George did more than secure the commission and administer the job, for he always seems to have been more interested in missionary work than in architecture. Both William,

183, WEST GEORGE STREET
GLASGOW 10th Jan 1872

Dear George

Your last letter relieved us of a great deal of anxiety on your part - for although I had considered from the tone of your previous letter that you felt your self well again - yet Aunt Emily had taken up a different impression and infected us all with her fears.

I am glad to learn that you are now taking active steps for carrying out the chief object of your mission which are all the more likely to have good results from the help afforded by the American Brethren in giving the Bible and Bibles very glad to learn that Mr. Gillespie is to accompany you. Indeed I suppose by the time you get

his elder brother, and his son, also called William, had been out to West Africa and George's house in Glasgow was a centre for missionary activity. He had long been connected with the United Presbyterian congregation at the Gordon Street Church and was much involved with its Sabbath-school teaching. In 1850 he became an elder and later was made session clerk. George designed a new pulpit in the Gordon Street Church, "to succeed the old sentry-box in which Dr. Beattie had so long preached. A number of the ornaments were cast in stucco, and then

painted; these were all shaped and prepared for use either by himself or his sister."

The letters Alexander wrote to George after his departure are remarkable not least for how little they tell us about architecture. Family affairs and news of friends assume greater importance while much space was devoted to detailed financial matters and to current building and rental prices in Glasgow. In particular, Alexander was anxious to inform George about the receipts from their Gordon

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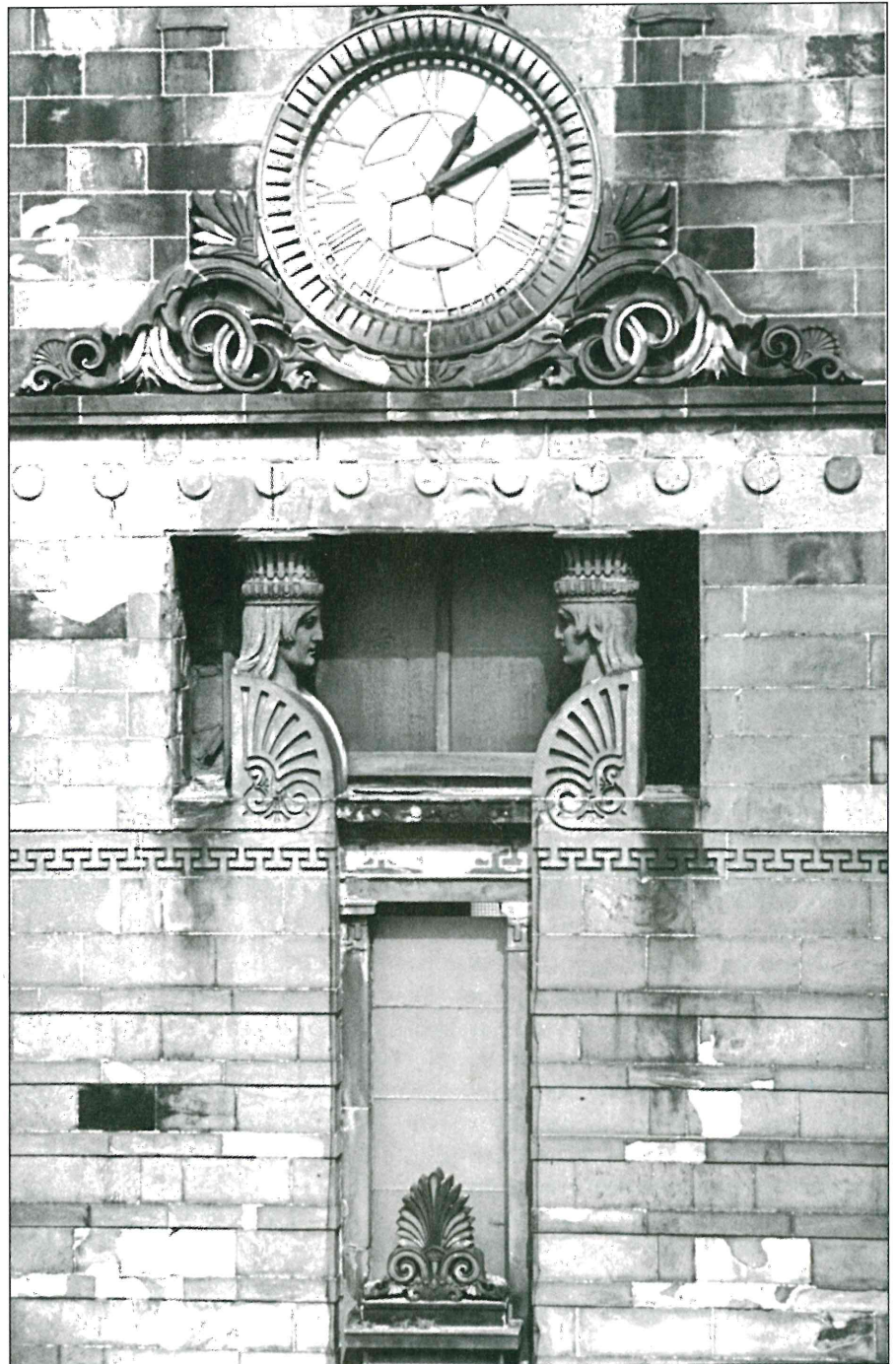
CHERUBIM OVER ST VINCENT ST

High up on the tower of the St Vincent Street Church are pairs of herms wearing crowns like column capitals which are placed within the windows below the clock faces. These are illustrated and discussed in our new book in the essay on Thomson and sculpture by Alexander Stoddart, who wonders if they were executed by John Mossman. But what are they, and why, as Thomson usually eschewed figurative sculpture, are they up there? **Sam McKinstry** may have the answer.

Over the past few years, as I have examined the detailed photographs of the St Vincent Street Church tower taken by Gavin Stamp, I have had the feeling that there was something familiar about the paired herm busts which appear on the storey below the clock, and which are illustrated here. What do they signify? Where do they come from?

Part caryatid, imbued with Grecian or even Egyptian solemnity, they invest the upper reaches of the tower with a sense of awe and mystery. Are they male or female, and what are those fan-like, shoulder-height quadrantal features meant to represent? Here the architect terminates his incised ornament on both sides of the window openings with a flourish which could be vegetal in inspiration, but which would not be out of place on the top of a Greek warrior's helmet. It dawned on me recently that my feelings of vague familiarity stemmed from a resemblance between these busts and the cherubim in the tabernacle of Moses as described in the Book of Exodus:

"And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end... And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another... And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of



the testimony..." [Exodus XXV, v.18-22, King James's translation]

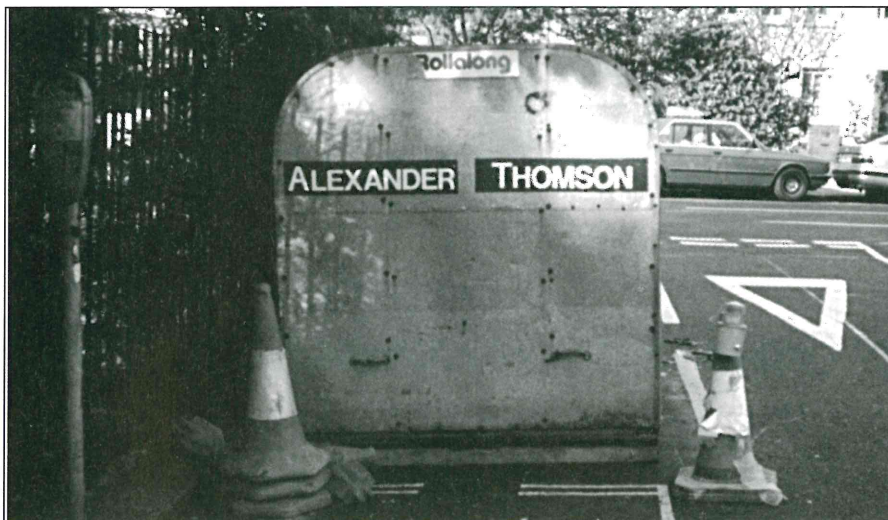
The mercy seat was located in the holy of holies in the tabernacle, and in due course occupied the same chamber in Solomon's Temple. In an earlier *Newsletter* [No.8], I argued that there is little close resemblance between Solomon's Temple and the St Vincent Street Church, but here is a hypothesis which I am prepared to entertain: that Thomson borrowed and adapted biblical precedent in order to invest the upper reaches of

the tower with a sense of "the holy". The wings are in the wrong place, but in synthesising the abstract and the figurative, perhaps, adaptation was suggested and the quadrant shoulders may be interpreted as folded wings.

It is a speculative idea, but entirely consistent with everything we know about Thomson and his theological interpretation of architecture and architectural history.

Continued on Page 5

'Puzzled of Notting Hill' writes...



This strange and sinister object has recently been observed, parked outside my house. Is this a visitation from another Planet? Could the name be significant, and connected with another? Are they related? I think we should be told!

CHERUBIM ...Contd

On a similar theme, Professor James Stevens Curl writes:

A designer of Thomson's calibre would never have used certain motifs without reason. Two items employed in his domestic architecture are the stars on one ceiling and the sunburst on another.

Stars were a common motif used by Piranesi in his designs, and Piranesi's imaginative use of Classical elements in his exotic creations anticipate Thomson's by a century or so. However, stars on a ceiling have a meaning in Freemasonic terms, suggesting the Canopy of Heaven with innumerable stars, and therefore the Covering of the Lodge. In this sense, the building or the room becomes a mnemonic of the Temple of Solomon and of the origins of Architecture itself. Architecture, closely identified with the Word, and with the Old Testament, is an expression of deeply-held religious belief. Stars suggest Fellowship, Divinity, Resurrection, and Light shed in the Night. In this sense, therefore, the stars preside over illuminating conversation in good fellowship, an appropriate symbolism for a drawing-room.

The Sun at its highest point suggests High Twelve, or Noontide, when work stops and refreshment is taken (an obvious theme for a dining-room). The Sun also represents

Enlightenment, Wisdom, Power, and Goodness or Benevolence, and its warmth is likened to hospitality, good cheer, and the ever-present Deity. It also suggests the Master-Mason, watching with Wisdom over the proceedings, and presiding over the Fellowship and the Lodge.

In such contexts the colours of fire-surrounds may also be important. White, represents Purity, Truth, Innocence, and Hope, and is therefore the colour of a Freemason's Apron. Black can symbolise Grief, Sorrow, and Death, but in Masonic terms it can refer to Prudence and Wisdom, Silence and Secrecy. Wisdom in conviviality and guarding against idle chattering for mischievous purposes might be suitable thoughts for a dining-room, after all.

Freemasonic symbolism is deeply imbued with ideas from the Old Testament.

Thomson was a Presbyterian, familiar with the Word and with that Testament. It is my contention that there is very little he would decide upon in a design, colour-scheme, or decorative proposal that would not have some inner meaning, perhaps more obvious to his generation than to ours. Some of these matters are described in my book *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry*, published by B T Batsford, 1991.

More Thomsonesquiana

IN JUNE, a fine mid-19th century mahogany hall stand appeared in the Glasgow salerooms of Phillips which was attributed to Thomson. Speculation arose that it might have been designed for Holmwood. Juliet Kinchin, however, was doubtful about the attribution to Thomson and, in the event, the Holmwood hypothesis was exploded by the fact that the hall stand was too wide, by a matter of inches, to fit in the recess in the hall at the house. The National Trust for Scotland therefore decided not to bid for it and Lot 199 sold for £2,800.

We are, of course, always anxious to learn of sightings of furniture which might be designed by Thomson.



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LANGSIDE ACADEMY

Readers studying the fascinating list of persons who contributed to the Alexander Thomson Memorial which was printed in *Newsletter* N° 10 may have paused to wonder at the first name listed. Who was Alex. Adam of Langside Academy who contributed the substantial sum of ten pounds?

Langside Academy (*right and below*) is one of Alexander Thomson's least familiar buildings. Photographs of it must be quite rare, as it was demolished at the turn of the present century. It was located at the corner of Camphill Avenue and Langside Avenue (opposite the present Mulberry Hotel) in what was then a sylvan setting between Langside woods on one side and the grounds of Camphill Estate on the other. The site of the building is now occupied by fine red sandstone tenements dated 1903 high up on the corner.

The Academy was a private school which originally had been founded by Alexander Adam's father George. Adam senior came to Glasgow in the early 1850s to be a teacher in David Stow's Free Church Normal Seminary in the Cowcaddens. In 1858 he opened his fee-paying private school for the education of young ladies and gentlemen at the village of Langside to the south of Glasgow. For several years in the early 1860s the school was conducted in Campside, a house which stood in Millbrae Road not far from Thomson's famous double villa.

George Adam died in his forties in 1862, and it seems to have been his widow Jane Constable (who took over as proprietor and Lady Principal) who commissioned Alexander Thomson to design a new school building.

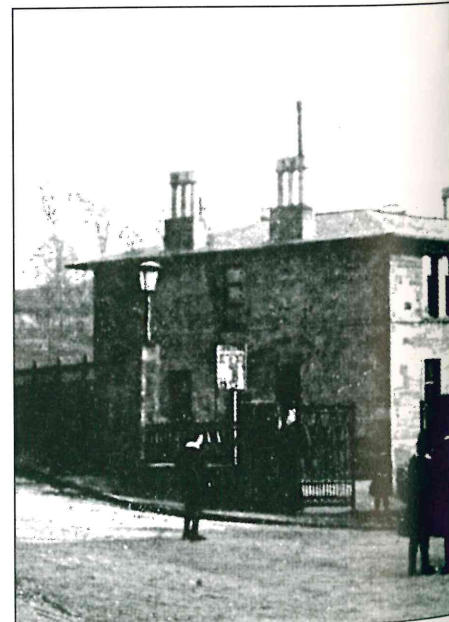
Externally, as can be seen, the school



resembled a large rather plain villa. Internally it was divided into classrooms downstairs and living accommodation for the staff and pupil-boarders upstairs. These boarders included at times "the sons of South African chiefs", or so a later writer informs us. The new school was obviously a great success, and this together with an increase in the population of the district had by 1871 threatened to render the accommodation inadequate. On 20 September 1872 Thomson wrote to his brother George in Africa:

"I made plans of a Manse for John Stark but the cost when estimated turned out too high and it is not yet decided what we are to do about it. A set of plans which I made of a double villa for Mrs Adam and her son-in-law Mr. J.H. Robertson are in the same position".

Almost immediately after this the double villa known as Edgehill House was built for the Adams and their relative James H. Robertson, a Glasgow lawyer. It is seen in the photograph just beyond the school, and in fact still survives in mutilated form. The design which has been selected, however, looks as though it can have had little or nothing to



BACK ISSUES

OF THE Society's *Newsletter* are available, price 50p each plus 2 second class stamps, from the Hon. Secretary at the Society's address.

MEMBERSHIP LEAFLET

THE SOCIETY has reprinted its membership leaflet. If you know of someone who might be interested in joining the Society and supporting our work, please write to the Hon. Secretary at the usual address.

GREEK T: THE BOOK

with Thomson. Edgehill House was ready for occupation by 1873, and at that time the first floor of Thomson's adjacent school building—previously living accommodation—was converted into classrooms. The whole building then comprised some thirteen classrooms in all.

The school has an extra interest because Thomson sent his own children to it. His son John Thomson (1859-1933), the future architect, attended it before going on to the High School, and from the prize lists for 1873 we learn that 'Jessie Thomson, Strathbungo' had been awarded a certificate of merit in English while 'Miss Amelia Thomson, Strathbungo' won a prize for map drawing. The Adams were known to give Thomson's name as a reference to parents considering sending their children to the school.

Alexander Adam continued as principal of the Academy until the late 1890's. He eventually retired to Crieff where he died in 1919. The school meanwhile had become Langside Girls High School under a new principal, but it survived for only a short time before being demolished about 1902, less than forty years after it had been built.

John McLeish

We are pleased to announce that a new book on Alexander Thomson has been published by the Edinburgh University Press. Entitled '*Greek Thomson*', it is a book edited by your Chairman and Honorary Treasurer who, after each independently deciding that a book of essays on different aspects of Thomson's achievement was necessary and possible, sensibly joined forces. We like to think that the result is a significant contribution to our knowledge of Thomson and to the architectural history of Glasgow. It has 250 pages and 195 illustrations, including eleven in colour. Members of the society can purchase the book at a reduced price by using the form enclosed with this *Newsletter*.

There are seventeen contributions to the book. The introduction is by the late Sir John Summerson and was his last piece of writing for publication before his death in 1992. It describes his first visit to Scotland in 1926 and explodes the often repeated notion that Thomson was somehow "forgotten" until recently. Charles McKean writes about the Glasgow of the 1850s in which Thomson's talent emerged and traces the strange history of the Glasgow Architectural Exhibition whose premises in Bath Street Thomson designed; David Walker explores the Scottish background to the development of Thomson's style. James Macaulay examines Thomson's literary and pictorial sources; Sam McKinstry writes about his architectural theory and, in a chapter written with Jane Plenderleith, explores his debt to Friedrich Schliermacher, the German theologian. Alexander Stoddart examines Thomson's attitude to sculpture and relationship with the Mossman family of sculptors. Both John McKean and Brian Edwards discuss Thomson's contri-

bution as an urban architect to the development of Glasgow and his work for the Glasgow Improvement Scheme while Mark Baines analyses his urban facades. Ian Gow examines Thomson's domestic interiors, Juliet Kinchin discusses his furniture and Sally Joyce Rush investigates the collaboration with Daniel Cottier on the interior of the Queen's Park Church.

Finally, three chapters explore Thomson's international significance; David Watkin looks at the German connection; Andor Gomme and Gavin Stamp suggest a possible debt to the American architect and pattern book publisher, Minard Lafever, and Andrew MacMillan compares Thomson, Mackintosh and Wright. A postscript by Gavin Stamp completes the book.

No member of the Society will wish to be without a copy.

SAVE MONEY ON 'GREEK' THOMSON

by returning the form enclosed
with this Newsletter
to the publishers

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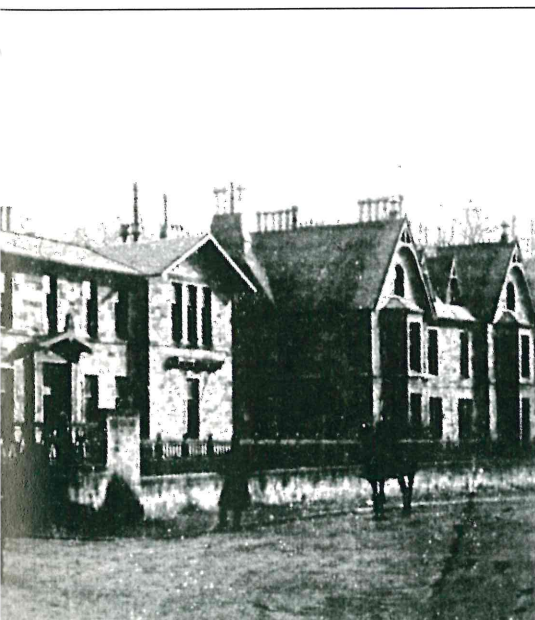
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Professor Andor Gomme and
Professor Andrew MacMillan.



SO WHAT DOES A GRECIAN URN?

In our last *Newsletter*, we published a note about a "Garnkirk Vase" being offered for sale. We are confused: the fireclay object designed by Thomson is properly known as the Garnkirk URN.

But there is every reason for confusion, for both a Vase and an Urn were on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and examples of both are held by the Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries. Confusion is also created by both Vase and Urn being published in in the Great Exhibition catalogue, *The Industry of All Nations* but apparently attributed to Ferguson, Miller & Co. of the Heathfield works near Glasgow when both, in fact, were made by the Garnkirk Fireclay Co. Further confusion may be created by the fact that the Garnkirk Company also made a "Florence Vase" which was exhibited at the Dublin Exhibition of 1853 and which now stands proudly in the Signet Library in Edinburgh.

The Garnkirk URN was designed by Thomson and modelled by his friend, the sculptor John Mossman. It is quite different from the other fireclay VASES inspired by Antique models as it is of a distinctive tall and



narrow form, of singular elegance. We are glad to know that a specimen is held in store at Kelvingrove. This was given by John Thomson, the designer's son, in 1927 and was exhibited in the Glasgow Parks Department's display during the Garden Festival in 1988. The accessions register records that the urn, "as stated on the authority of Mr. John Thomson... was designed by his father "Greek Thomson" for the Garnkirk Fireclay Company. The Grecian Vase [sic] was later presented by said Company to the donor's father. It is noteworthy that this vase now presented was sent by said Company as a sample of their work to the International Exhibition organised by Prince Albert in Hyde Park London in 1851. It is also noteworthy that there is another copy of this vase (May 1927) in the hands of Mr. Adam Cairns of Ingleside Newlands (Glasgow) a son-in-law of "Greek Thomson".

In a note on "Alexander Thomson and Garnkirk" in *Garnkirk Fireclay* by

G. Quail [Auld Kirk Museum Publications N^o 11, Stathkelvin District Libraries & Museums, 1985] Francis Worsdall recorded that, "The copy of the urn in my possession is 4ft. 3in. in height and was rescued from the already vandalised Caledonia Road U.P. Church a short time before the interior was totally destroyed by fire in 1965. At the time it had been smashed into some 60 fragments (one only missing) and was carefully restored. It stood in a special niche on the gallery staircase and was lit from above by a small dome. During restoration it was quite clear that it had been painted in bright primary colours, the base being the red which he frequently used. The rest was not clear. It obviously had matched the internal decoration of the church which Thomson himself had designed." As recounted elsewhere in this *Newsletter*, this restored Urn fell apart in the fire which gutted part of Mr Worsdall's home shortly before his death earlier this year.

THOMSON DOORS OPEN WIDE

ALEXANDER Thomson greatly contributed to the success of this year's 'Doors Open Day' in Glasgow on September 17th. The St Vincent Street Church, both halves of the Double Villa and Holmwood were all open and all besieged by visitors.

The National Trust for Scotland, in fact, opened Holmwood for three days running and the number of people visiting and showing interest in Thomson's architecture must surely have quietened any doubts within the Trust about the wisdom of acquiring the house. Those who staffed the doors on the day—the congregation of the St Vincent Street Free Church, Professor and Mrs McEwen, and Mrs Ballantyne in the Double Villa, and the National Trust for Scotland—are all to be congratulated, and thanked: as are ATS members who volunteered to be on duty.

What was particularly thrilling at Holmwood was the glimpse of the painted decoration which conservators from the Stenhouse Conservation Centre of Historic Scotland have begun to expose. It may well be that more of the original decorative scheme survives under layers of wallpaper and paint than we had dared hope. There is even evidence that the Arthurian murals executed in the Drawing Room by Hugh Cameron may still exist. In the Dining Room a portion of the rich, spiky decorative scheme has been uncovered as well as several panels of the frieze of scenes from the *Iliad* drawn by John Flaxman carried out in terra-cotta red and blue.

There can be no doubt that what can be seen in the plates in *Villa and Cottage Architecture* was carried out and it also emerges that above the sideboard and the (now lost) mirror in the recess was a larger version of Flaxman's representation of *Homer invoking the Muse*. It is clear that when this room is fully restored it will be spectacular, fully justifying Gildard's superlatives: "Unique beauties and ingenious devices were to be seen everywhere. Of the polychromatic decoration of the walls, ceilings, doors, I might also say "it beggar'd all



description".

Your Chairman only regrets that this work was not begun earlier as a colour photograph of the decoration could have illustrated Ian Gow's essay on Thomson's domestic interiors in the new book published by the Edinburgh University Press.

What is emerging in Holmwood also illuminates James Macaulay's chapter on Thomson's literary and pictorial sources. Dr Macaulay notes that the combination of tower and portico at the Caledonia Road

Church may have been inspired by early views of the Acropolis, but a closer source may have been Flaxman's representation of *The Meeting of Hector and Andromache* (above). For this scene has now been revealed in the Dining Room of Holmwood and, in the background, there is a tetrastyle Doric portico integrated with a lateral squat tower and a smaller colonnade beyond. It is not the Caledonia Road Church, of course, but it may have provided a hint.

St Vincent Street Church

SLOW PROGRESS continues to be made towards setting up a charitable trust to handle the full restoration of the St Vincent Street Church.

What is very good news, as it can only push matters forward, is that the church is to be the principal venue for the 1995 annual Convention of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland next May. As a result of this, hundreds of Scottish architects, as well as distinguished foreign visitors, will be introduced to the magnificence of the interior and the originality of Thomson's one surviving ecclesiastical masterpiece.

The BBC has also assisted in focussing national attention on both the importance of the building and

the scandal of its neglect by making the St Vincent Street Church the subject of a feature in the *One Foot in the Past* series on television. This particular ten-minute programme, which starred your chairman, was also broadcast as a separate repeat. As if we didn't know, Greek Thomson's buildings look good on TV.

Your chairman is also working on one of the *Architecture in Detail* monographs published by Phaidon to be devoted to the church, but is hampered by the paucity of original documentary and illustrative material. If any members know of photographs of the interior taken before the redecoration of c.1970 he will be very glad to hear from them.

Not The Queen's Park Terrace

Following our article on the long-demolished second "Queen's Park Terrace" in Newsletter N° 10, Colin McKellar has been researching further and writes that,

"The last Post Office Directory to carry the original numbers for Eglinton Street was the 1876/77 edition. The G.P.O. does not seem to have recognised Queen's Park Terrace as an address and the occupiers (who included John McIntyre and William Stevenson) did not make use of it. On my reckoning, Queen's Park Terrace was originally numbered 233 to 279 Eglinton Street while the "second" terrace was numbered 281 to 323 Eglinton Street.

"The 1858/59 street directory lists N° 303 only while the 1859/60 directory lists numbers between 283 and 321. N° 281 appears in the street directory for the first time in 1860/61. James McKenzie, grocer and wine merchant, 281 Eglinton Street, appears in both the street and the general directories for 1860/61. However, the name in the photograph is John McKenzie, who is listed in the general directory for 1859/60 as grocer and wine merchant at Dumbarton Road, Finnieston Street, and at 281 Queen's Park Terrace, Eglinton Street" which is the only instance I have found of Queen's Park Terrace being used in an address. 'In 1857 and 1858, Messrs McIntyre, Baird and Stevenson feued four areas described as east of Eglinton Street. I hope to identify these areas in the future..."

We welcome reminiscences about Thomson buildings, whether from previous residents or those who remember visiting or working in buildings now demolished. Please write to the usual address.

ON THOMSON'S LOST CHURCHES

Ian Muir, currently completing a book off reminiscences, tells of two personal experiences of Thomson's two lost churches (in the sense of having completely disappeared), Queen's Park and Ballater Street.

In the course of my enquiries I was sent a photocopy of the ATS Newsletter for February of this year in which the Church is discussed. My memory of the affair is of the thunderous A-A fire from batteries on top of the Cushtat Hill where there was a forces camp (above and nearer Busby than what is now the Linn Cemetery), just across the Cart from our house in Stamperland. Afterwards I was allowed out of bed to look out the window, and—Frank Worsdall was right—the blaze DID light up the whole of the South-side.

As I recall it though, only the Church itself was destroyed, the single-storey part fronting Langside Drive and rounding the corner into the Lane to the South remaining. It eventually housed government offices, perhaps a Labour Exchange. Certainly, either when I sought 'Deferment' from National Service in order to undergo my engineering apprenticeship in Weir's at Cathcart or, five years later in 1955, when I and was assembling the paperwork necessary to go to sea as an engineer in the Merchant Navy, I had to present myself there to obtain what was required.

The exterior was very shabby by then, painted in a dingy green, the interior being a pale eau de nil, if I recall correctly. Eventually this department moved out and as far as I can recall the building was unused

thereafter, becoming ever more derelict until demolished probably no later than the mid-'60s.

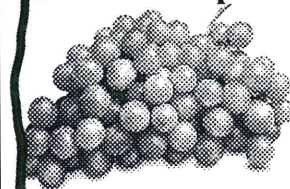
I can only emphasise what a shock the loss of Queen's Park Church was to one wee boy, and how saddened I was in its last years to see the utter decrepitude into which the remaining part had sunk. Curiously, I was later to gain brief first-hand knowledge of a lesser light that also became a bright one.

In 1960 I took on the Glasgow area agency for an Aberdeen based manufacturer, and this led to nearly five years of following more or less in father's footsteps around the sights of what was to become all too soon *The City That Disappeared*. On one occasion I was required to call upon David R. Montgomery, Cork and Bottle Closure Manufacturers, in Ballater Street, whose building also had a familiar look about it, being the former Chalmers UP Church.

I was led up a staircase, then across the upper floor to an office at the rear where the extent of the glazing was worthy of note. MacFadzean tells us that the three-inch yellow pine boarding lining the interior was clear varnished but, as I recall, the woodwork of the east wall nearest the City of Glasgow Union Railway and the ceiling, were painted all over in a deep Prussian blue. If I recall aright the well had been floored in between the galleries, though I think the former front rails remained in place.

Whatever the case, the whole place was stacked out with boxes and packing cases in such profusion that it was no surprise to me when it attempted to burn as brightly as the lamented Queen's Park Church.

Greek Thompson Seedless Grapes



Per lb
ONLY

69P

French Golden

We always said that Thomson (with or without the 'P'), represented good value. Now we know it's true. Available from your local Co-op.

DEAR GEORGE...

Continued from Page 3

Street property, for this income was vital to them both. This, of course, was the Grosvenor Building designed by Alexander. It had been built on the site of the Gordon Street Church which the two brothers had bought in 1856 after the congregation had decided to move west to St Vincent Street "on account of the great increase in the value of property in Gordon Street". Begun in 1860, the Grosvenor Building must, therefore, have been an expensive investment and a constant worry to Alexander and George, especially as it had been damaged by fire soon after completion and had to be restored in 1864.

Alexander did not waste space in his five letters to George and his handwriting is often difficult to decipher, particularly when closely written on flimsy light blue paper sheets (almost like modern air-mail paper although they were transported by sea). In his biography of Alexander Thomson, Ronald McFadzean unerringly quoted all the salient passages in these letters which are of architectural significance, but what remained unquoted is full of interest because of what is revealed about contemporary attitudes and preoccupations in Glasgow. These five letters have not, however, ever been published in full before. Now, thanks to the kindness of Mrs Catherine Rentoul, Alexander Thomson's great-grand-daughter, we are able to reproduce the complete texts in our *Newsletter*.

In this first instalment, we publish the first two, shorter letters; the first was sent soon after George's departure and the second reached him when first established in West Africa at the missionary colony founded by the Baptist Missionary Society.

1, Moray Place, Glasgow
3d June 1871

Dear George

We were glad to learn by your letters from Lisbon that you had got so far so well and were in good spirits. I hope that the remainder of the voyage was equally pleasant!

When I wrote you last I was on the point of starting for London. I enjoyed myself very much saw a good

deal that was worth seeing and met with a good deal of attention from the London brethren. I called upon Sandy Skirving without giving him any warning. I was very much pleased with him. He seems to be working hard and aiming at distinguishing himself. I saw a drawing of his in an exhibition in connection with the conference which did him great credit. He took me to see his employer's place—Messrs. Heaton Butler & Bayne they are glass stainers & decorators. They and some others seem to be adapting Japanese art to their Gothic things with great success. While some that were strong Goths a short time ago are now as zealous for what they call the Queen Ann style. I met young G.G. Scott at dinner at Stevenson's he made his appearance in black knee breeks black silk stockings high heeled shoes with large buckles, blue coat, yellow vest white neck cloth with stiffener and frilled shirt—He is one of the Queen Ann folks.

I have little to say about business. Nothing particular has occurred since you left. Have not yet got the accts. out but mean to do so as soon as I can. We have begun operations at the Insurance company property. The Caryatids were objected to by the people at the head office.

There was a letter for you from Dr. Nassau to day and one from Miss N. to Emily but not knowing that this was the last day for the mail I sent them to Emily at Blairlogie. He seems wearying for relief and does not know that it is so near. His sister and he are the only people at the station. We are all well and I am joined by all here and many besides in wishing you God speed. Your affc. Bro- A. Thomson

183, West George Street Glasgow
10th Jany. 1872

Dear George

Your last letter relieved us of a great deal of anxiety on your part—for although I had considered from the tone of your previous letter that you felt your self well again, yet Aunt Emily had taken up a different impression and infected us all with her fears.

I am glad to learn that you are now taking active steps for carrying out the chief object of your mission which are all the more likely to have good results from the help afforded by the American Brethren in giving the Elfe[?] and I am very glad to learn that Mr. Gillespie is to accompany you. Indeed I suppose by the time you get this you will have been up the Hill and down again. I have a great many inquiries from friends as to how you are getting on. Aunt Emily has of course given you the sad intelligence of Mr. Murray's death. I have now to add that of Mr. McIntyre's. He had been confined to the house for rather more than a fortnight complaining of spasmodic pains in his bowels accompanied with irregularity in their action which could not be controlled by medicine. On Wednesday last the symptoms became alarming. His bowels had not acted for a week and while taking a walk in the nursery a violent attack [sic] of the spasms came on and with difficulty he got home. The Doctor (Stirton) was sent for but he could not do any good. Next day he brought out Dr. Gardner and after that Dr. Fleming besides McAuslan and Dr. Howit but all to no purpose. On Sabbath afternoon strong inflammation set in and on Monday morning at half past five he died. He bore his sufferings with great bravery and was quite resigned to the will of God—a postmortem examination showed that cancer in the bowels was the cause, which had been going on for at least two years. We are likely to have a new Church for Dr. Jeffrey. The Railway is proposed to go through part of the Hall. I have just learned that the Hurlet & Campsie Allum [sic] Coy.s property in Union St. has been burned to the ground right through to Alston Street. The Union Street Building is attracting considerable attention—and if Mr. R would consent to let it in small portions there are many who would like to get in to it. Within the last few days a party was enquiring for the whole either to lease or buy it. The Smiths have also been renewing their negotiations for it.

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DEAR GEORGE...

Continued from Page 11

I enclose statement of Gordon Street business for last term. I have not yet got the money but expect it in the course of today and I shall put your share in Bank in your own name. I had intended to make up a kind of statement of the other matters but I have not managed it yet - I hope you will write me as soon as you return from your expedition with a description of it to show to friends. We had Dr. Nassau with us last night. He is a very agreeable man. He returns to Liverpool today. Now dear George take care of your health and may God prosper you.

Your affectionate Brother A. Thomson

Abstract of Messrs. T. & G. Frame's acct. for Whitsunday 1872 in connection with Gordon Street Property

Half years rent	1133-16-8
Taxes	59-2-9
Interest on Bonds	387 3
Ground annual	341-5-0
Tradesmen's accts	21-18-10
Insurance	91-0-0
Sundries (including A.T.s 60)	79-18-10
Commission for half year	15-0-0
	995-16-8
Balance	138-0-0

I have placed another Hundred pounds to your credit making in all Three Hundred pounds in Bank at your command A.T.

Notes on the Letters:

Alexander Skirving (d.1919) had been Thomson's chief assistant and, after he returned to Glasgow, continued to design in a Thomsonian manner, as at the Langside Hill Church.

The particular interest of this first letter is that it reveals that Thomson knew J.J. Stevenson and had met George Gilbert Scott junior (1839-1897), the brilliant son of his absent adversary in the Glasgow University controversy, (Sir) George Gilbert Scott. The younger Scott, like his host, Stevenson, came to reject both his father's approach to architecture and his favoured 13th century Gothic style-taking up, indeed, the "Queen Anne" style for domestic architecture. The Glasgow-born architect John James Stevenson (1831-1908)

had worked for Scott in London and then returned to Glasgow in 1860 and joined Campbell Douglas. In 1869 he returned to London and would deliver a ferocious attack on Scott's restoration practice in a lecture at the R.I.B.A. in 1877. Stevenson's office in London became a centre for expatriate Scots architects and designers.

Emily was Thomson's sister, Amelia (1815-1901).

Dr Nassau had been a missionary himself in equatorial Africa and is mentioned in the *Memoir of George Thomson*.

The identity of the insurance building which Thomson wished to embellish with caryatids is not known.

In the second letter, the death described is that of John McIntyre, the builder, who was Thomson's collaborator as co-developer on several projects, not least Moray Place. He is buried in the magnificent tomb in Old Cathcart Churchyard which Thomson had designed for

McIntyre's son Donald, who had predeceased him. The inscription begins: "Erected 1867 by John Mc.Intyre, Builder in Glasgow, in memory of Donald Mc.Laren his son born 21st August 1858 Died 28th April 1866 JOHN Mc.INTYRE, BUILDER IN GLASGOW, Died 8th January 1872, aged 49..."

Dr Jeffrey was the minister of the Caledonia Road Church, which was threatened by the City of Glasgow Union Railway viaduct running from Pollokshields past the Caledonian Railway's Southside terminus to the Clyde. In the event, this portion of the Glasgow South Western Railway's route into St Enoch managed to miss both the church hall and Thomson's adjacent tenement in Cathcart Road. It is, however, puzzling that this railway was threatening the church at this date as the line had already been established and was almost complete.

"The Union Street Building" was Egyptian Halls, which had been designed for James Robertson.

To be continued.

FRANK WORSDELL

Continued from Page 2

George Street (1839, by John Stephen), Frank's methodical and detailed evidence was not challenged by the developer's expert, A.M. Doak. Alexander Thomson had started his architectural training in the same block as St Jude's Church and the connection between John Steven and Thomson was accepted by the reporter. Frank was a quiet, unassuming character and on these occasions would arrange his reference books on the table as if they were a protective wall.

Helen Bovey organised many series of lectures by Frank in the 1980s, after Glasgow University stopped this subject in its extra-mural classes. For the members of the audience who could absorb the great numbers of slides, these lectures gave some insight into the quantity of architectural information in every area of the city. A typical series of lectures would start with David Hamilton and continue through the generations of Glasgow architects, Charles Wilson,

J.T. Rothead, John Burnet, John Honeyman, William Leiper, Alexander Thomson, James Sellars and C.R. Mackintosh. On other occasions a series of lectures would be presented on different building types and these were followed by guided walks around Dennistoun, Cathcart, the city centre and the Necropolis.

In the early 1970s the only expertise on Glasgow stained glass was Frank's fund of knowledge, gained with his friend, a local organ builder. Frank's father had been a builder in the city and this was the origin of Frank's intense interest in Glasgow's architects and builders.

Frank joined in protests when graves were to be removed to make way for car parking at Glasgow Cathedral. He owned a lair in the Necropolis although he has now been buried in Cathcart cemetery: which has the monument to William Gardner Rowan, his favourite funeral monument.